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03/26/2012 10:05 AM

To Rich Hood, Cecilia Tapia

cc Mark Hague

bcc

Subject Fw: University City Patch - Radioactive Waste in our Groundwater

Shd we do an update, in person in STL, of the affected congressionals (Lacey Clay, Carnahan) and state legislators? Just where the process is, so they know more about the issues and the process?

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Date: 03/26/2012 09:09 AM
Subject: University City Patch - Radioactive Waste in our Groundwater

Radioactive Waste in our Groundwater

Sen. Maria Chappelle-Nadal's column.

- 8:00 am, 10/26/12

<http://universitycity.patch.com/articles/radioactive-waste-in-our-groundwater>

It takes an awful lot to anger me.

For the last month I have been learning about radioactive waste in North St. Louis County. My friend and environmental stalwart, Kay Drey, told me about this issue a couple of years ago but I did not fully understand the scope of environmental and health ramifications of radioactive waste like I do today.

Last week I toured three areas in my new senate district that have radioactive waste – specifically 43,000 tons of radioactive waste (uranium) that was illegally dumped into an unlined municipal dump. I have also discovered that one of the American Water intake sites — that is responsible for supplying drinking water for all North St. Louis County residents — is only eight river miles downstream.

About three weeks ago our local [NPR station](#) had a piece on the high rate of cancer among residents in North St. Louis County. I do not know if the two things are connected at all, but

certainly you can understand why I am frustrated about this situation. Last Friday I decided to take an even closer look at the situation to see for myself what the areas look like and try to address questions that still lingered.

Before I took this tour, I had several meetings with environmental advocates in St. Louis and before I knew it the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* had a front page article dealing with the EPA and radioactive waste in the same area. Obviously, the stars were aligned.

While I am disappointed with the original decision of the Environmental Protection Agency ([EPA](#)) to leave radioactive waste at the site, I am hopeful the EPA will change its mind as a part of its process to reevaluate its decision. This is radioactive waste in our own back yard and some people's front yard. You may have read recent news reports regarding the EPA's plan to leave Cold War-era radioactive waste at the West Lake landfill in Bridgeton, one of many sites across the St. Louis area that was contaminated by Mallinckrodt Chemical Company's uranium processing operations. In 2008, the EPA announced it would leave the contaminated soil and try to contain the damage by covering the site with debris and monitoring the groundwater around the perimeter; however, this controversial decision was met with backlash from environmentalists, Congressman Russ Carnahan and a few local government entities urging federal officials to reconsider their plan. Bridgeton, Florissant, the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County all passed resolutions against the plan. I have discovered that Lambert Airport, which is operated by St. Louis City, opposes the plan to remove radioactive waste because they fear birds will interrupt air traffic. But I have also discovered ways that this possible removal can be contained without disruption to air traffic.

In December, the EPA released the findings from a supplemental study that analyzed alternative cleanup options, citing a \$400 million cost to haul the waste away compared to \$41 million to cap the site. The report also said that digging up the waste and hauling it away could potentially be more dangerous to the community than simply leaving the waste in the ground, where numerous underground water sources could be contaminated. While these concerns are valid, there is simply no way to predict floods or earthquakes that could irreversibly spread radioactive waste into the Missouri River and into thousands of peoples' drinking water.

Click [here](#) to see more photos of my tour on Friday, March 16.

There are several thoughts that resulted from our discovery. What puzzles me the most is the fact there are multiple sites around St. Louis where the same radioactive waste from Mallinckrodt are being cleaned up, but not at West Lake.

One of the sites that I visited under remediation is near Lambert Airport along Coldwater Creek. What I saw were two above ground water treatment structures and a lined pond that contain radioactive water. I was greatly concerned because there was a plastic tube that went from these above ground structures, over the bridge where the creek is and finally into the ground. We are unaware of whether radioactive waste is going into the ground or whether there is a liquid that is leaving the ground and going into the nuclear waste. This is an immediate concern. As recent as the 1980s people — adults and children — played in this creek for recreational purposes. I am again unaware if there is any relationship to the disproportionate rate of cancer in North St.

Louis County, but it is again one of those red flags that needs to be addressed sooner rather than later.

Next I visited the West Lake Superfund site in Bridgeton where 43,000 tons of radioactive waste was illegally dumped. Federal regulators have put up a fence around the perimeter of the landfill with neon warning signs. Someone who is unfamiliar with this issue would naturally think the property outside of the area is okay. But from what I am learning and estimating, that is not the right conclusion. In fact, we should all be concerned about radioactive contaminated groundwater getting into the soil and reservoirs not within the landfill and are headed into in the direction of the Missouri River and into other areas, such as the American Water intake site, residential areas and the businesses of the area.

In 1988, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission issued a report on West Lake that identified lower-level contamination already exists. Today I learned while in a telephone conference call with representatives of the EPA that samples as far as 100 yards away contain radioactive waste. Just yesterday, a senator from St. Charles said that his county is now purchasing water from St. Louis County. So let's just start the "what-if's" now.

The cleanup of these sites I am referring to were transferred to the Army Corps of Engineers under a program created in the mid-1970s to help cleanup sites tied to the government's atomic energy and weapons programs. Why is the EPA not giving the same consideration to our West Lake landfill, and why is the decision taking so long? It is time that we work together and put pressure on federal officials to work with our cities, county and region to make St. Louis County a safe place to live.

About this column: A weekly column from state Sen. Maria Chappelle-Nadal, D-University City. The opinions expressed in the column are those of Sen. Chappelle-Nadal and do not reflect the views of University City Patch.